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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/RPM (COPE) AND SCA/A (SINGH)

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TAGS: [NATO](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [AU](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRIA: SECURITY SUPPORT FOR 2009 AFGHAN ELECTIONS

REF: STATE 131480

Classified by: DCM Scott F. Kilner for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador, DCM, Econ/Pol Counselor, DATT and Polchief discussed reftel demarche with GOA officials across the government, as well as with the German Ambassador to Austria during a series of meetings December 17 to 23. Austrian officials said the MFA and Defense Ministry would review the question of supporting the Afghan elections, but would be hard pressed to find the resources if Austria, as expected, continues its Chad mission. An MFA contact confided that outside political pressure would be needed to convince the GOA to send personnel to Afghanistan, and suggested that high-level USG officials contact their GOA counterparts. The German Ambassador, after consulting with Berlin, said the German government had no plans to request Austrian support in RC-North, as during the last Afghan elections. Given Austrian integration with German forces during the 2005 Afghan elections, Embassy believes the GOA is most likely to be swayed by encouragement from the German government in early 2009. We suggest that Washington consider approaching the Germans about engaging more actively with Austrian counterparts. End Summary.

Chancellor's Office

¶2. (C) The DCM discussed the Afghan elections December 17 with Bernhard Wrabetz, Diplomatic Advisor to Chancellor Faymann. DCM stressed that the U.S. had valued and appreciated the support Austria provided for the Afghan elections in 2005, when the GOA deployed 100 personnel. We understood that the Austrian military was stretched thin, particularly due to the Chad mission. Nevertheless, the U.S. hoped the GOA could support a temporary mission to provide security during the 2009 Afghan elections. DCM stressed the importance of a successful election, and emphasized that Austria could make a meaningful contribution in a number of ways. The GOA might, for example, provide medical support, or personnel for information operations, he said.

¶3. (C) Wrabetz averred that any internal GOA process of approving an Afghanistan mission would be long and arduous. He noted that it took four months to win approval of the Chad mission. The Austrian public is deeply skeptical of deployments to dangerous missions, and Austria's newly installed government would have to manage criticism from the opposition parties, he said.

Foreign Ministry

¶4. (U) In a first meeting with the MFA's new Political Director, Stefan Lehne, on December 19, DCM discussed our demarche at length. Lehne replied that the GOA understood

the importance of the elections. He said the MFA and Defense Ministry would meet shortly to discuss the possibility of providing support. At the same time, the GOA was close to approving a continuation of its Chad deployment after the UN takes that mission over from the EU. An extension of the Chad mission would limit Austria's options for Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the GOA would look for ways to support the Afghan elections, Lehne said.

¶ 15. (C) PolChief followed up on December 23 with Bruno Bilek, MFA Deputy Director for East Asia and the Pacific. Bilek said that the date of the Afghan elections and the nature of the proposed Austrian deployment would be key factors in determining whether the GOA could contribute. A later election date would allow more time for Austria to prepare. Bilek averred that the MFA favored an Afghanistan deployment, particularly in light of Austria's status as a non-permanent UNSC member. However, it would be up to the military to identify the manpower. The Austrian military only sends volunteers on overseas missions, so officials would have to identify -- within a stretched force -- an appropriate number of willing personnel with the training required for the mission, he said. Moreover, the Defense Ministry and the MFA would need to determine where the funding for a mission would come from, he said. Bilek also acknowledged that the new government feared the possible political consequences of deploying personnel on a dangerous mission. He suggested that high-level USG officials raise the issue with their GOA counterparts. "We in the civil service can't do this on our own," he said. "We need political pressure."

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Defense Ministry

¶ 16. (C) Major General Pucher, Defense Ministry Director for Security Policy, told the DATT December 18 that he has long argued for greater Austrian support for the Afghanistan mission. Pucher said the Austrian military has prepared for Defense Minister Darabos a range of options for providing support in Afghanistan, but until decisions are made on the future of the missions in Chad and the Balkans, it will not be possible to determine whether Austria has the manpower and funding to spare for Afghanistan.

German Embassy

¶ 17. (C) Ambassador Girard-diCarlo on December 19 told German Ambassador Westdickenberg that we had been instructed to ask the GOA to provide security support for the Afghan elections. He told Westdickenberg that we believed the Austrians might be more willing to deploy personnel to Afghanistan if they could co-locate them with German forces, as they have done in the past. Westdickenberg said he had not yet received instructions, but would consult with Berlin. On December 22, Westdickenberg reported back to the Ambassador that Berlin had not raised the subject of security support for Afghan elections with the Austrian government and had no plans to demarche the GOA on this issue. Ambassador Girard-diCarlo believes the Germans may not yet see this as timely.

Comment

¶ 18. (C) It is an objective fact that, with peacekeeping commitments in the Balkans, the Golan Heights and now Chad, Austria's very limited military capabilities are strained. Nevertheless, we believe that Austrian niche capabilities could make a meaningful contribution to Afghan election security and that significant parts of the military and

foreign policy establishment are favorably inclined. However, whether the new government can muster the courage at the political level to support even a limited Afghan engagement is very much open to question. In this context, Embassy believes that Germany is the ISAF member best placed to make the case to Austria. Embassy therefore recommends that Washington seriously consider approaching the German government about actively soliciting Austrian support.

GIRARD-DICARLO